

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

How should perceptions and conceptions of sustainability and citizenship influence teaching-learning processes for sustainable development education and intercultural sensitivity?

Kaivola, Taina

University of Jyväskylä, Institute for educational research
2003

Kaivola , T & Cabral , S 2003 , How should perceptions and conceptions of sustainability and citizenship influence teaching-learning processes for sustainable development education and intercultural sensitivity? in J Lasonen & L Lestinen (eds) , UNESCO Conference on Intercultural Education : Teaching and Learning for Intercultural Understanding, Human Rights and a Culture of Peace+ . University of Jyväskylä, Institute for educational research , Jyväskylä , pp. -- , UNESCO Conference on Intercultural Education , Jyväskylä , Finland , 15/06/2003 .

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/33895>

submittedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

HOW SHOULD PERCEPTIONS AND CONCEPTIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY AND CITIZENSHIP INFLUENCE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESSES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY?

Kaivola, Taina, University of Helsinki, Finland, taina.kaivola@helsinki.fi

Cabral, Sophie University of London, UK

In collaboration with

Manuela Malheiro Ferreira, Fernando Alexander, Margalida Castells Valdivielso, Lea

Houtsonen, Branca Miranda, Frances Slater and Miquel Trobat

Abstract: This research is one of the outcomes of a EU Comenius project TETSDAIS- Training European Teachers for Sustainable Development and Intercultural Sensitivity. As an essential part of the research activities of the project, a detailed questionnaire of environmental attitudes, conceptions of active citizenship and futures perspectives of young people in four partner countries was conducted during the academic year 2001-2002. It was done to investigate the ‘voices’ of young people, which should be taken into account in planning teaching-learning processes for sustainability. In this paper the outcomes of a selected set of open qualitative questions are presented and looked into.

Keywords: environmental awareness, education for sustainability, active citizenship

Introduction

The partners of EU Comenius project TETSDAIS - Training European Teachers for Sustainable Development and Intercultural Sensitivity come from universities in Portugal, United Kingdom, Spain (Balearic Islands) and Finland. The target groups of this three year project are European teachers and teacher educators. At the same time, TETSDAIS is also a research and development project of the International Geographical Union’s Commission on Geographical Education (TETSDAIS 2003). The main discussion point of the project is how to encourage the professional development of European teachers on the themes of sustainability and intercultural sensitivity and how to integrate the theme in school curricula to meet the students’ needs. In order to achieve these goals, three major themes were explored: (1) the theoretical concepts connected to education for sustainability were clarified, (2) a questionnaire dealing with environmental attitudes and values of 15-year-old students was conducted in partner countries. Conclusions of these efforts were put into action on (3) an in-service course for European teachers arranged in Lisbon last autumn.

Theoretical framework of the project

The concept of sustainability has acquired many meanings after it emerged from English-speaking academic circles during the 1970s (Boehmer-Christiansen 2002, 363). Currently it is commonly used in major national and international declarations and institutional policies to serve many purposes including sustainability reports of multinational corporations and official documents at local, national and global levels. However, despite this publicity, most people cannot come up with meaningful descriptions of sustainability and concepts like active citizenship connected to it (Jucker 2002, 10; Wright 2002, 105). This seems to be often the

case among educators as well (Cabral 2002; Slater 2001, 47-48). That is why at the first meeting of TETSDAIS partners in Lisbon in April 2001 a theoretical framework of core concepts and their meanings was created (Figure 1).

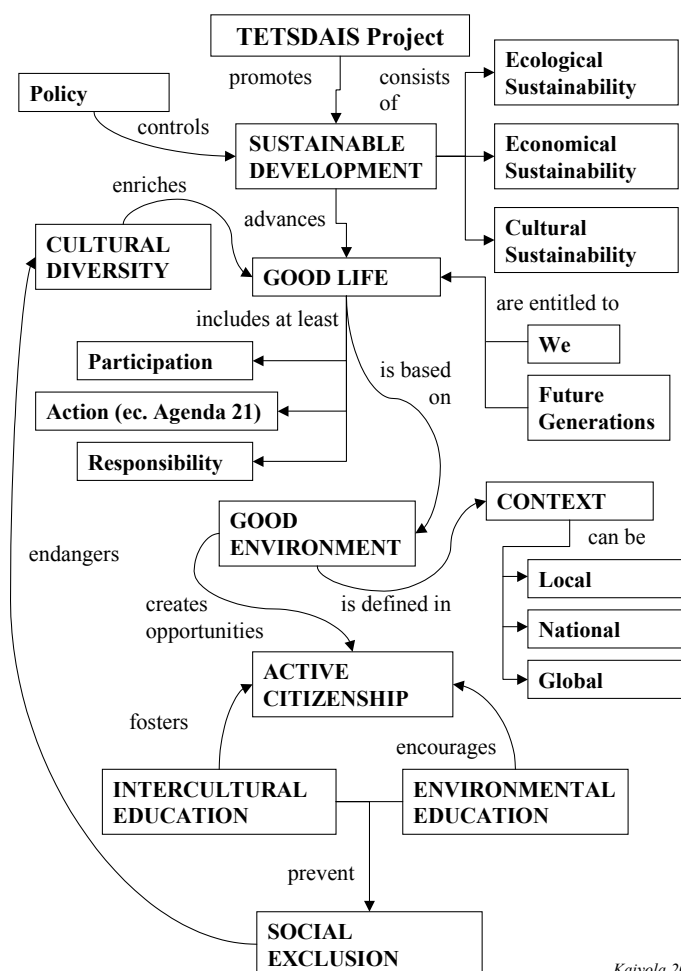


FIGURE 1. The core idea and theoretical framework of TETSDAIS project (TETSDAIS 2003).

Active citizenship is a most important concept in affecting policies that direct the three major fields (cultural, economical and ecological) of sustainability. The ways we see good environment and good life are defined in context, which can be local, national or global. To grow up as an active citizen both environmental and intercultural education is needed. Together they prevent social exclusion, which endangers cultural diversity by among other things, discouraging individuals to understand and tolerate different kinds of people around them. We strongly address the importance of cultural diversity as an essential factor for good life in Europe.

Students' voices

The selection of open questions of the questionnaire presented here dealt with students' conceptions of nature, environments, place preferences and environmental problems. The analysis of the open questions was done on the basis of a sample of between 30 and 50 questionnaires from each of the four countries to obtain an idea of the range of thoughts of

students across the countries and to identify any differences between them. The ideas given were broadly categorised although as much as possible the diversity of answers was maintained to retain the often subtle differences in thinking.

When we talk of nature what comes to mind? The range of ideas presented by the students can be grouped into (i) something that is not human e.g. forests, wildlife, pure air, sea (ii) something at risk or destroyed by people (iii) something to be protected. The first category contained the greatest number of responses particularly with reference to forests and wildlife.

TABLE 1. The students' conceptions of nature.

	Portugal	UK	Spain	Finland
1	Green spaces	Live beings/wildlife	Live beings/wildlife	Forests
2	Forests	Forests	Forests	Live beings/wildlife
3	Countryside	Countryside	Something destroyed	Beautiful/peaceful

The three most common answers are tabulated for the four countries in table 1. There is common agreement across the countries on their perceptions of nature with two notable exceptions. Finnish students were marked apart by their often literary descriptions of nature as something of beauty, wonder and a resource important to physical and spiritual well being of people. They were also the only students to see nature as a leisure resource. The other marked difference is the concern by a number of Spanish students that nature is destroyed although students in all countries except Portugal had responses that indicated that nature was something that should be protected.

When we talk of the environment what comes to mind? This question contained responses in similar categories to the previous question. However, a notable difference is that pollution featured in many responses. Also more global environmental issues were cited such as global warming and acid rain. There were more responses about the fact that it is about our surroundings and something that should be preserved and conserved. It appears that it is a more emotive concept than nature involving the interaction of people and 'nature' both mainly negative consequences (Table 2). Here again common ideas across the countries with perhaps the main difference the focus on damage and conservation strongly perceived as part of the idea of the environment in only Spain and Finland.

TABLE 2. Students' conceptions of environment.

	Portugal	UK	Spain	Finland
1	Pollution	Our Surroundings	Something destroyed	Something to preserve/conserve
2	Place to live with no pollution	Pollution	Something to preserve/conserve	Beautiful/relaxing
3	Our Surroundings	Wildlife/habitats	Nature & oceans	Something destroyed

Which environmental problems most affect your daily life? By far the most common theme was pollution (general – not articulated) but also pollution from cars and water pollution. Pollution and rubbish/waste disposal were identified as important in all countries (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Students' conceptions of environmental problems affecting their daily lives.

	Portugal	UK	Spain	Finland
1	Pollution	Car pollution	Car pollution	Industrial pollution
2	Water pollution	Pollution	Rubbish/waste	Car pollution
3	Noise & waste disposal sites	Waste disposal sites	Industrial pollution	Water pollution

In Portugal and UK there were a high number of responses of simply pollution without articulating any specific type. Students in Spain and Finland were giving specific examples more frequently.

Describe your ideal place to live. Student responses divided into (i) type of place e.g. forests, by beach, warm countryside, city (ii) social characteristics e.g. no crime, no poverty and (iii) environmental concerns e.g. no pollution, where people care about nature and (iv) specific named places. Most students wanted to live in the countryside although a significant number were content with the place they currently live in (Table 4). Students in three of the four countries chose the place they currently live as their ideal place despite a focus on problems of pollution for the question on environmental problems that affect their daily lives. For all the countryside was an ideal place to live although perhaps not their preferred place given the previous comment.

TABLE 4. Students' preferences of an ideal place to live.

	Portugal	UK	Spain	Finland
1	No pollution	Countryside & quiet	Countryside	Where I live now
2	Where I live now & countryside & no poverty	No pollution & no crime	No pollution	Countryside
3	Quiet	Wild space	Where I Live now	City with less pollution

Which two problems in your country concern you the most? A great variety of responses from environmental to social, political and economic were given (Table 5). Pollution the one cited most often. Environmental problems featured most often. Poverty, immigration and refugees were the next most common responses. A clear focus was on pollution, but again not articulated except in the case of Finland.

TABLE 5. Students' concerns of national problems.

	Portugal	UK	Spain	Finland
1	Pollution	Pollution	Pollution	Industrial pollution
2	Poverty	Crime	Immigration/refugees	Rubbish/waste
3	Drugs	Racism & lack of renewable energy	Environmental problems	Water pollution & depopulation

Conclusions

There results give us some clues and guidelines for students' attitudes and values connected to environment, but moreover raise important questions for us as educators. How should these conceptions of students' be taken into account while developing educational activities for sustainability? Are we as educators focusing on pollution more than other environmental issues in that it is the most common response for a number of questions? As Hicks and Bord (2001, 413) point out, learning about global issues with major problems about human conditions and environment, is thus potentially a traumatic activity. The students have the concern to care about the future but how do we give them the optimism and ability to imagine a better world and skills to at least imagine possible strategies to achieve that world? Without this the next generation of decision-makers will continue to struggle on towards an unreachable goal.

The students answering these questions seemed to be quite aware of their environments and had realistic ideas of their limited possibilities to act as active citizenship at their age. They were also aware of multicultural global cultures, environmental problems and hazards connected to urbanization. However, the attachment to their local surroundings and culture was also evident as well as desire to live in peaceful and pure rural landscapes. Research shows, that students have quite positive view of environment and they give it a lot of different

value laden meanings (Alerby 2000, 218; Kaivola & Rikkinen 2003; Loughland, Reid & Petocz 2002, 192) Engaging these themes in empowering and meaningful teaching-learning processes for sustainability by taking into account their images of environments and social systems is an essential challenge of teachers and teacher educators (Kaplan & Kaplan 2002, 251-252; Lijmbach, Margadant-Van Arcken & Van Koppen 2002, 128).

This awareness of the deep meaning local pro-environmental action promoting participatory planning, peaceful sustainable living and values clarification, was several times pointed out in many of the posters produced by teachers attending the TETSDAIS in-service course (TETSDAIS posters 2002). Despite the present day realism of difficulties of disseminating sustainability as a transdisciplinary core of all education stressed by Jucker (2002, 13), there is still a need for education for sustainable development to provide space for reflecting on achievements to date and imagining a world that could be sustainable. "If we cannot imagine a sustainable future then it is unlikely to be achieved." (Wade, 2002, 111). The greatest challenge, however, is imagining and realising a strategy to succeed.

References

Alerby, E. 2000. A way of visualising children's and young people's thoughts about the environment: a study of drawings, *Environmental Education Research*, 6 (3), 205–222.

Boehmer-Christiansen, S. 2002. The geo-politics of sustainable development: bureaucracies and politicians in search of the holy grail. *Geoforum* 33, 351–365.

Cabral, S. 2002. Sustainable development and education: What is it all about? <<http://www.helsinki.fi/ml/maant/igu-cge/tetsdais/materials>> (Accessed March 2003)

Hicks, D. & Bord, A. 2001. Learning about global issues: why most educators only make things worse. *Environmental Education Research* 7 (4), 413-425.

Jucker, R. 2002. "Sustainability? Never heard of it!" Some basics we shouldn't ignore when engaging in education for sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 3 (1), 8-18.

Kaivola, T. & Rikkinen, H. 2003. Recreation, free time activities and space related experiences of Finnish young people. In M.E. Robertson & M. Williams (eds.) *Young people, leisure and place: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Nova Scientific, New York. In press.

Kaplan, R. & Kaplan, S. 2002. Adolescents and the natural environments: The time out? In P. J. Kahn Jr. & S. R. Kellert (eds.) *Children and nature: Psychological, socio-cultural, and evolutionary investigations*. London: The MIT Press, 227-257.

Lijmbach, S., Margadant-Van Arcken, M. & Van Koppen, C. S. A. 2002. 'Your view of nature is not mine!': learning about pluralism in the classroom. *Environmental Education Research* 8 (2). 121-135.

Loughland, T., Reid, A. & Petocz, P. 2002. Young people's conceptions of environment: a phenomenographic analysis. *Environmental Education Research* 8 (2), 187-197.

Slater, F. 2001. Values and values education in the geography curriculum in relation to concepts of citizenship. In D. Lambert & P. Machon (eds.) *Citizenship through secondary geography*. London: RoutledgeFalmer, 42-67.

TETSDAIS 2003. Training European teachers for sustainable development and intercultural sensitivity. <<http://www.igu-net.org/cge/TETSDAIS/>>. (Accessed March 2003)

TETSDAIS posters 2002. Materials and outcomes of the in-service courses. <<http://www.igu-net.org/cge/TETSDAIS/materials/posters.html>>. (Accessed March 2003)

Wade, R. 2002. Sustainable development education and curriculum. *Teaching Geography*, July, 108-111.

Wright, T. S. A. 2002. Definitions and frameworks for environmental sustainability in higher education. *Higher Education Policy* 15, 105 – 120.